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Wafer Seals

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Dangerous Diving

By Grady Starnes, Hobby Diver #4889

September 10, 2011 was a beautiful day. Five friends and I had booked a charter on the Cooper River to look for sharks teeth and other artifacts. This was my third trip but my past experiences would not prepare me the dangerous encounter I would face today.

The captain was a great guy and was very knowledgeable about finding sharks teeth. He put us on some great spots but we just could not find the

big Megs we were looking for. The Captain told us if we heard him rev up his engine three times to surface. On the third dive, I heard the engine rev up so I checked my equipment and surfaced. I surfaced about 20 yards from a green boat. I saw four men pulling on ropes and struggling with something in the water. Then I saw one of the men lean over the side with a pistol and shoot. That's when I saw the massive head of an

alligator rise out of the water. At this point lots of things go through your mind. The only thing I could think of was swamp people and that guy who yells "shoot him shoot" that's when I yelled to the hunters "shoot him again". At this point, I don't know who was more shocked to see a SCUBA diver in the water, the 3 boats who had gathered to watch or the hunter with the gun. The hunter shot the gator once more and

I drifted back to my boat. The engine I heard rev up was the gator hunters.

Once on my boat I thanked God for my safety. The Captain moved us closer to the hunters where we helped load the gator and gets some pictures. The gator was over 13 feet long and was the biggest the hunters had ever killed. The boy who shot the gator with his bow was 14 years old. The young man told us we were crazy because there were alligators in the water here.

Yes, I do plan to dive the Cooper River again and I understand the dangers. It's all worth it for the thrill of touching and pulling something out of the water that could be millions of years old!■



Wafer Seals

By Carl Naylor, SDAMP

We here at SDAMP headquarters have never met an artifact we didn't like. That goes double for an artifact recovered from the bottom of the Cooper River by licensed hobby diver Catherine Sawyer. Cat recently sent us photos of her find: an implement used to seal letters and documents with glue wafers, mostly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It's called a wafer seal.

Like the more familiar sealing wax, wafers provided a somewhat secure closure for personal correspondence. In fact, the choice of wafers or wax reflected social customs of the day. When sending a letter to one's betters, etiquette required the use of sealing wax. Wafers were for equals or one's inferiors. One can only imagine the hours spent in eighteenth and early nineteenth

century parlors discussing who fit into which category.

Glue wafers were made of a mixture of wheat flour, water, egg white, and (most often) coloring, that was made into a paste, dried in sheets, and punched out into small, flat discs. A fancier form, called "medallion seals," was made by filling molds with colored paste which when dried mimicked wax seals, provided your vision

was bad. Wafers were commonly colored red, but other colors became popular as well. As was the fashion with wax seals, the color of the wafer often indicated the user's sentiments. Black was used by those in mourning, green indicated friendship, yellow was for holidays and journeys, purple for invitations, and so on. The wafer could be applied in one of two

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Wafer Seals (continued from page 7)

ways. They could be used like sticky labels, by wetting the bottom of the wafer and placing it over the join, or as an adhesive, by wetting it entirely and placing it between two pieces of paper. Either way, pressure needed to be maintained until the pre-wetted wafer dried. The wafer seal supplied this pressure.

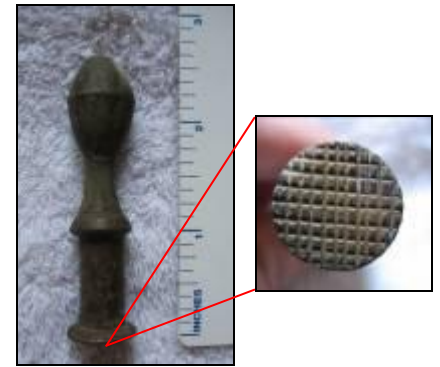
Wafer seals are often misidentified as either their cousins wax seals or as pipe

tampers. Pipe tampers, due to their single function of tamping down tobacco in round pipe bowls of all sizes, have round, flat, and usually smaller working ends than wafer seals. Wax seals most often have monograms, coats of arms, or other insignia to leave an impression in the wax. Wafer seals have a simple crosshatched design on their bases, which is most often round, but sometimes

square or rectangular.

The introduction of self-adhesive envelopes in the middle of the nineteenth century rendered the use of wax and wafer seals obsolete.

The best artifacts are those that not only show us how we accomplished tasks in the past but also reveal social customs. Cat's recent find certainly does that. Thanks for the photos, Cat!■



**18th century wafer seal found
by hobby diver Catherine
Sawyer**

My First Hobby Diving Experience

By Ashley Deming, SDAMP

On the morning of October 4, 2011, I joined Hobby Divers Ted Churchill and Jay Hubbell for my very first hobby diving experience. My goal was to understand a day in the life of a hobby diver. I've been diving loads of times in the Cooper, but always as an archaeologist and usually on a shipwreck. I really wanted to know what it would be like to

view the day through the eyes of one of our hobby divers.

We suited up at the landing and set off to an undisclosed location on the Cooper. Ted wanted me to experience the raging currents of the river so we got in, he tethered me to him, and we rode this current that was pointless to swim against. I now completely understand

why all of you wear kneepads. The knees of my wetsuit now look like a wild animal attacked me!

Now it was time for the hunt. We moved onto a spot where Ted and Jay assured me we would find some teeth and maybe some artifacts. When I dropped down, it looked (yes looked, as there was at least five feet of visibility!) like a place where glassware goes to die. Broken glass of all time periods scattered the bottom in only around 15 feet. I'm more into ceramics, but I thought Carl might appreciate identifying a nice medicine bottle if I found one. And I did! A cute little thing that looked like the typical ones I had seen time and time again in hobby reports. Couldn't hurt

to have another in the SDAMP collection for our workshops. I put it in my BC pocket and ventured father on in search of these meg teeth I have heard so much about.

I dropped down onto a shelf ledge to around 20 feet. I worked my way along it appreciating the geology of the marl and the amazing power of water erosion (can't help being a scientist I guess!), when I saw it. There on the ledge, teetering on the edge of the drop-off, was a 4 ½" meg tooth. I had seen fragments and small teeth on this dive, but this was huge! I assumed that my dive buddy left it there for me just to make sure I had a good first experience. It was just placed there with nothing else around it

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**My first big
meg tooth**